

### VIII. LETTERS TO MADAME TISSERANT

Mrs. Tisserant was the mother of Eugene Tisserant who, together with Frederic Le Vasseur, had conceived the work which led to the foundation of Father Libermann's congregation. Ordained in 1840, he became Prefect Apostolic of Haiti in 1844. In the following year, after the failure of the Haitian mission, he was appointed Prefect Apostolic of the Two Guineas. He died December 7, 1845, in a shipwreck on his way to Africa.

Alexandre Dumas, author of *The Count of Monte Cristo*, who also was a Haitian, had nothing but praise for the parents of Father Tisserant. In his *Journal* he wrote:

Let me say a word about the "Work of the Holy Angels," a house for poor orphans.

When you pass through St. Denis street, if you are not afraid of being crushed by vehicles or thrown off balance by passers-by, stop at no. 248. Until 1849 this building was used as a pharmacy, which was operated by an excellent man named Tisserant. Here was the start, the humble nest of the Orphanage.

One day, an old woman, holding a small girl by the hand, entered the pharmacy under the pretext of buying a drug; she paid for it and forgot (!) the child in the pharmacy. The child was two years old. Madame Tisserant, a good and holy woman with a charitable heart thought for a few days that the old woman would return to fetch the poor little child. A month passed by, but no one came. She understood then that the child had been sent her by the good Lord. She could have sent it to the asylum for foundlings but she refused to do it. However, since she had already seven of her own who had excellent appetites, she engaged the services of another lady to bring up the pretty baby who was baptized under the name of Marie-Ange. You see that the little girl thus won two beautiful names by losing her own.

The charity of the two ladies became known in that part of the city and lazy parents found it advantageous to follow the example of the old woman in depositing their

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children in that pious establishment. So one child after another found its way there and Madame Tisserant felt obliged to get other women to help her.

Today the Orphanage has ninety little girls; it is the only orphanage that does not refuse children born out of wedlock.

Mr. Tisserant died in 1849. He was a friend of Récamier [the French Minister], who admired both his heart and his science. Science might perhaps have been able to enrich Mr. Tisserant, but how can you amass wealth when you give your drugs away to the poor and try to raise the children who are forgotten in a drugstore? Tisserant thus died poor, leaving behind a work founded by him that was richer than himself.

Besides the testimony of the famous writer there is also the tribute of Father Lamoise:

I was in Paris on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception in 1845. This was the day on which the devout mother of Father Tisserant, together with other ladies of the capital, requested a novena of perpetual prayer in honor of the Blessed Virgin in behalf of Father Tisserant and the Mission of the Two Guineas. And it was on that very day that Father Tisserant rendered his beautiful soul to God through the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

His virtuous parents were members of several charitable societies. It was a pleasure to see them disputing with one another in the house regarding what could be given out in works of charity. "She takes everything for her own," said Mr. Tisserant, "and leaves nothing for me to wear when I have to go to meetings!"

*Libermann's grief over the death of Father Eugene Tisserant.*

*Letter One      La Neuville, January 1, 1846      Vol. 8, p. 3*

Dear Friends:

*[Our Sorrow Must be Submissive to God's Holy Will]*

I am not going to announce to you the sorrowful event that brought mourning to us all! You have certainly been informed of it and your hearts must be filled with profound grief. I would try to console you were it not that I myself am most grievously afflicted by it. I suffer from the threefold sorrow of having lost an intimate friend and zealous collaborator who was most dear to my heart, of seeing an important mission deprived of one upon whom I had built the fondest hopes, and finally of beholding a family who is more than dear to me plunged into sadness and desolation.

I feel your sorrow as keenly as my own and, at the same time, am unable to bring you consolation.

Great is our loss and it is deeply felt. But what can we say or do? God gave us that dear friend and He has taken him away. May His Holy Name be blessed! Who would dare to ask Him to justify His action? Who would dare to say, "Lord, why have you done this to us?"

All God's designs transcend our feeble intelligence and His decrees are always most merciful. Let us prostrate ourselves in His holy presence and say to Him, "Lord, what You do is done well! What a joy it would have been for us, Lord, if we had possessed this dear child of our Blessed Mother a little longer! Who would not have desired to have the consolation of seeing him labor many long years for Your glory! But our plans are not Your plans. You are the Master; we are but

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Your poor servants. You have willed to destroy our beautiful dreams; You have crushed our heart by sorrow. We submit to Your Adorable will and adore what we are not able to understand. We make this sacrifice for You with all our hearts."

My dear friends: Terrible indeed is the trial which Divine Goodness has sent us. Let us be faithful! Let us strengthen our faith and quicken our love for the God of mercy. If we want succor and encouragement, let us have recourse to Mary. She will console us; She will give back courage to our fainting hearts. We know that Mary guided all the steps of that dear and faithful child of her Heart. We may be sure therefore that if she led him on that disastrous voyage, it was in order that she might more quickly open for him the door of the home of the Blessed.

#### [*A Blessed Death*]

Your son is not to be pitied! He now possesses what he so ardently longed for. He leaves us here in this world where we must still wend our way among suffering and sorrows. But let us console ourselves; our time will come also and we shall have the happiness of joining him in glory. There God will wipe away all tears from our eyes. We shall receive ample rewards. We shall receive full consolation for the sacrifice we make to the adorable will of God.

One thing that can already help to console us is that we can firmly hope that he has already received eternal blessedness as a reward following that sad catastrophe. If he perished at sea it was solely because of the ardent zeal that had led him there. He felt unable to wait for the departure of the vessel that was scheduled to bring him to the dear souls for whose welfare he desired to sacrifice himself. So he eagerly sought passage on the *Papin*, a ship that would bring him a

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little sooner to the land which he wanted to sanctify by his labors, although this vessel was making a detour.

Our friend did not foresee the disaster that was destined for this vessel ; but He who inspired his ardent zeal, knew it well and it was not unknown to Mary. God wanted him to end his life on that ship. It was a blessing for him and it is a consolation for us that his life ended there where his ardent love for God and zeal for the salvation of souls had caused him to be. His recompense will be great indeed! May divine mercy grant us a similar death! We would then be able to present ourselves with confidence before the Sovereign Judge.

Let us pray to our Lady, asking her to pour out on us the tender affection of her Immaculate Heart with which she favored that soul that was so dear to her.

I feel perfectly confident that she will pour into your hearts the balm of consolation and will enable you to gain merit from that cruel sacrifice.

I beg you, always preserve the habit of friendship toward me which was initiated and sustained by our good Father Eugene. You may count on it that I will always remain,

Your devoted, most sincere and most affectionate friend and servant,

FRANCIS LIBERMANN

priest of the Holy Heart of Mary

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*Regarding her son's death. Requests about works of Mercy.*

*Letter Two La Neuville, January 31, 1846 Vol. 8, p. 50*

Dear Mrs. Tisserant:

*[Your Son Died as an Apostle]*

I enclose a copy of a letter sent me by Father Maynard, Prefect Apostolic of Senegal, dated January 24th. In it he gives details regarding the admirable conduct of our dear Father [Tisserant] throughout the terrible ordeal which led him to the end of his career.

This letter is very consoling. The details strengthen the idea I have had since the first arrival of news. I said to myself, perhaps my dear confrere will have to die from this, his last illness [Father Tisserant had become gravely ill after returning from Haiti in 1845]. This would have been most painful for him, for me, and for you as well—to think that he had to leave this world and that death took him while he was inactive. Our good Mother has not wished to permit such a premature and useless death. She wanted her servant to shed his mortal remains on the field of battle.

When I beheld him in his illness, it always grieved me to see him run the danger of dying while doing nothing. His ardent zeal deserved something better than that. As soon as I learned that his ship had been wrecked, I felt sure that he had shown great zeal in such a solemn moment. Knowing now that what I foresaw has been fulfilled, I can only bless God's goodness and Mary's tender love for her servant. Join me in making this sacrifice wholeheartedly; there is nothing but mercy in that sorrowful event.

I spoke to Father Schwindenhammer about the German woman whom you placed with Mrs. Beyrier. He told me

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that this lady is very pious and very good, and that she does not know what evil is and is ready to take the responsibility for her. Hence there is no difficulty in placing with her the poor orphan towards whom you feel moved by compassion through the promptings of the Holy Heart of Mary.

Mother Saint-Bernard, the superior of Louvencourt has asked me to recommend another young person to you and I could not refuse to speak to you about her. You should examine in the presence of our Blessed Mother whether you should undertake anything in this regard. The poor girl in question is between seventeen and eighteen; she has a difficult character, limited intelligence, and a weak and cold piety. Good Mother Saint-Bernard does not know what to do with her; she causes her great embarrassment. Celestine Denis can give you information about this girl—her name is Catherine Delsoit. I believe she is able to work well.

If you agree, and accept that Father Thévaux write the [biographical] notice regarding our beloved [Father Eugene], I have no objections. I'll even give details regarding the part of his life that is known to me.

I presume that my sister-in-law will soon arrive here from the United States.

I will pray to our good Mother that she may cure you of your illness.

I have the honor of being, in the charity of the Immaculate Heart of Mary,

Your most humble servant,

FRANCIS LIBERMANN,  
priest of the Holy Heart of Mary

Please give my most sincere and friendly regards to Mr. Tisserant and to the whole family.

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*Libermann explains in a pleasing way why he cannot invite her to stay at the Seminary.*

*Letter Three*

*Vol. 9, p. 259*

*Notre Dame du Gard, August 27, 1847*

Dear Mrs. Tisserant :

Don't be angry with me because I have delayed so long in replying to the request which Mr. Herpin made in your name on behalf of Gratien. We had to find out first whether there would be room for him during the holidays, for our confreres are all coming to stay here. So I have waited until our two communities had come. We are now all together and I see that there will be no difficulty in finding a little space for Gratien. I shall beg his father to bring him to us and to spend a few days with us ; it will be our pleasure to offer him a neat room which is reserved for distinguished friends who come to pay a visit. I feel sure that Mr. Tisserant will take advantage of this nice opportunity.

On the other hand, I don't dare invite Madame Tisserant, for we would have to leave her below in the parlor near the courtyard, and it is evident that it would not be worthwhile coming from so great a distance to stay here near the door, although it would be on the inside ! I know for certain that you entertain higher ambitions than that in regard to Heaven, that you are not content with aiming at getting a place just behind the heavenly door ! You must at least get as far as the apartment of the ladies-in-waiting of the Queen of Angels !



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If I found it possible to find a lodging for you, I would invite you for something which, I know, would please you, namely, the baptism of a sturdy Negro who is at present under instruction. I think that this ceremony will take place towards the end of September. . .

Best regards to Mr. Tisserant and the entire family.

Your most humble and devoted servant,

FRANCIS LIBERMANN,  
priest of the Holy Heart of Mary